

Shark Tournament

Offers Scientific, Environmental Dividends

By Steve Adams

If you care about sharks and their future in Massachusetts waters, set them free.

That is the philosophy that inspires this week's catch-and-release Scituate Invitational Shark Tournament.

"We're letting the fish go to convey a healthy level of respect for the marine environment and the conscientious use of that environment," said organizer Nick Emord of Hingham.

Emord, who is running the tournament for the second straight year, hopes the region's burgeoning shark fishery doesn't suffer the same fate as its ground fish and swordfish supplies, which have been decimated in recent years. "Kill" tournaments often take immature fish and reduce the ranks of fertile females.

"A Mako female is not mature until they reach 400 pounds," Emord said. "When you see 200- or 250-pound sharks being taken in at tournaments, they look like a big fish. But they're actually a baby."

Sixteen crews in last year's tournament captured 371 sharks, all of which were released, including a Mako and a thresher. The larger "money" sharks could have fetched up to \$4,000 on the market.

Most of the boats congregate around Stellwagen Bank, the national marine sanctuary spanning 638 square nautical miles between Provincetown and Cape Ann.

Paul McLaughlin of Scituate and his 42-foot Irish Rover charter boat took first place in last year's tournament, catching 49 blue sharks. Rick Colvin of Scituate finished second, garnering 26 blue sharks and one thresher. The 10-foot Mako was caught by Scituate selectman Joseph Norton.

"What people don't understand is Scituate is pretty much situated on the largest blue shark population on the East Coast," said John Perette, captain of the Scituate-based Katmandu charter fishing boat, which finished sixth last year. "I've fished off Montauk, but we have some of the largest game fish in the world."

He cited the world-record-breaking 454-pound blue shark caught July 19 off Martha's Vineyard by the crew of the Scituate-based Quality Time as evidence of the species' strength in the region.

"I tend to think that fish would have made his way up here around the Cape," said Perette.

Perette was leading last year's tournament before dropping his video camera on the second day, destroying the documentation for his catches up to that point.

"I don't mind it," he said of the catch-and-release format. "The filming is a pain, only because I'm a bad cameraman. It helps the species, but I don't believe a kill tournament could ever hurt the species."

Maybe not, but Emord said the tournament sends an important symbolic message.

"For the first time in history, we're seeing recreational sportsmen showing a level of respect for commercial fishermen," he said.

And tournament rules require crews to

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— John Perette, captain of the Katmandu

record the time and location of each catch — information that is passed on to state marine biologists.

"We're not just going out and catching fish; we're collecting scientific data that's used by the Massachusetts shark fisheries department," Emord said.

Twenty boats have already signed up for this year's tournament, which Emord believes is the only catch-and-release shark tournament in the nation. All participants must collect video footage of the fish captured and released. This information will be the basis for determining the species and number of sharks released for score. A committee, including a marine biologist and pelagic specialist, will review the video footage and judge and tally the scores.

The point system awards five points for a blue shark and 100

points apiece for Makos, porbeagles, threshers, tigers, white sharks, hammerheads and other sharks. No points are rewarded for dogfish or basking sharks.

The captain's meeting will be held today. Captains, crews and guests are invited to the meeting, which will include registrations, a reading of the Conduct of Sportsmen rules for the tournament and a presentation on sharks and their habitat by Greg Skomal, senior marine biologist for the state Division of Fisheries and Wildlife.

Fishing will take place between 8:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. tomorrow and Saturday.

Saturday's awards banquet will feature a Texas-style barbecue. All captains, crew and guests are invited to attend. Dinner will be provided for participants only.

Additional tickets to the awards banquet are available by advance request. Call 740-4514 to make arrangements.

TIDES

Below are listed the DST, A.M. high tide hours for Duxbury Bay, beginning with Thursday, Aug. 8, 1996. For low tide, add six hours.

| | |
|-----------|-------|
| Thursday | 7:30 |
| Friday | 8:30 |
| Saturday | 9:26 |
| Sunday | 10:15 |
| Monday | 10:59 |
| Tuesday | 11:39 |
| Wednesday | — |

Thursday, August 8, 1996

Duxbury Mariner

Nature



'We're Not Just Going Out and Catching Fish'

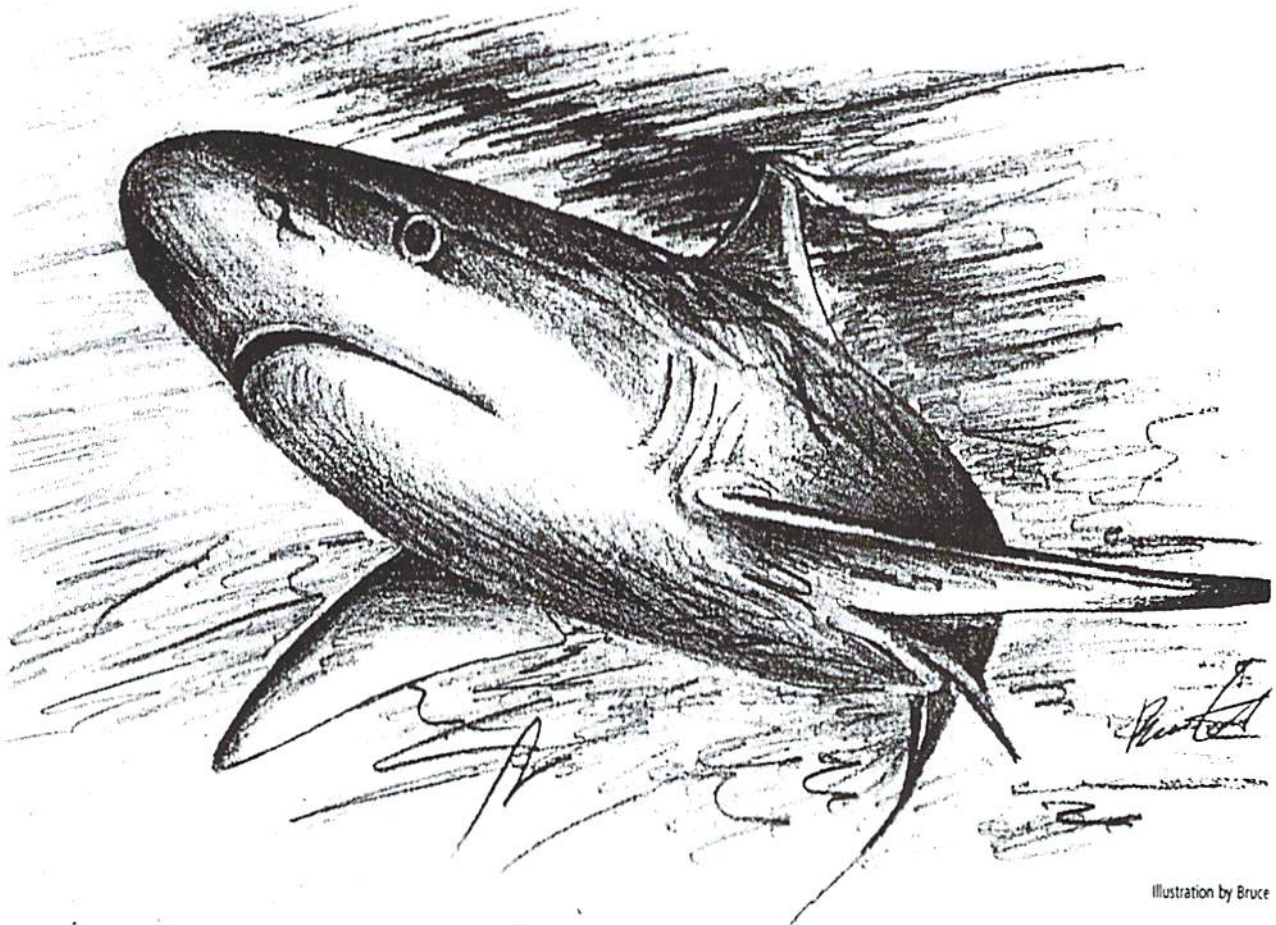


Illustration by Bruce